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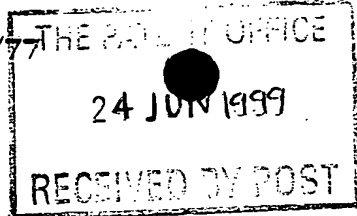
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24 JUN 99 E456828-1 D01091  
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The Patent Office

Cardiff Road  
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Gwent NP9 1RH

1. Your reference

AA 1465 GB

2. Patent application number

(The Patent Office will fill in this part)

24 JUN 1999

9914662.3

3. Full name, address and postcode of the or of each applicant (underline all surnames)

JOHNSON MATTHEY PUBLIC LIMITED COMPANY  
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TRAFALGAR SQUARE  
LONDON SW1Y 5BQ

Patents ADP number (if you know it)

536265607

If the applicant is a corporate body, give the country/state of its incorporation

GB

4. Title of the invention

CATALYSTS

5. Name of your agent (if you have one)

IAN CARMICHAEL WISHART

"Address for service" in the United Kingdom to which all correspondence should be sent (including the postcode)

JOHNSON MATTHEY TECHNOLOGY CENTRE  
BLOUNTS COURT  
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Patents ADP number (if you know it)

725831200

6. If you are declaring priority from one or more earlier patent applications, give the country and the date of filing of the or of each of these earlier applications and (if you know it) the or each application number

Country

Priority application number  
(if you know it)

Date of filing  
(day / month / year)

7. If this application is divided or otherwise derived from an earlier UK application, give the number and the filing date of the earlier application

Number of earlier application

Date of filing  
(day / month / year)

8. Is a statement of inventorship and of right to grant of a patent required in support of this request? (Answer 'Yes' if:

- a) any applicant named in part 3 is not an inventor, or
  - b) there is an inventor who is not named as an applicant, or
  - c) any named applicant is a corporate body.
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YES

# Patents Form 1/77

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Continuation sheets of this form	0
Description	6
Claim(s)	2
Abstract	1
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Priority documents

Translations of priority documents

Statement of inventorship and right to grant of a patent (Patents Form 7/77)

Request for preliminary examination and search (Patents Form 9/77) ONE

Request for substantive examination (Patents Form 10/77)

Any other documents (please specify)

11. I/We request the grant of a patent on the basis of this application.

Signature

*I C Wishart*

Date 23 June 99

I C WISHART

12. Name and daytime telephone number of person to contact in the United Kingdom

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CATALYSTS

The present invention relates to methods for the regeneration of catalytic reactors.

5 Catalytic converters are frequently used in internal combustion engines in order to meet the various regulations concerning the levels of pollutants in exhaust gases. A three-way catalyst is a common form of converter used. This has three main duties, namely, the oxidation of CO, the oxidation of unburnt hydrocarbons (HC's) and the reduction of NO<sub>x</sub> to N<sub>2</sub>. Such catalysts require careful engine management to ensure that the engine operates  
10 at or close to stoichiometric conditions, that is fuel/air  $\lambda=1$ . Growing awareness of the need to conserve the earth's resources and increasingly stringent legislation have recently prompted a search for cleaner and more efficient alternatives to the internal combustion engine. One of the most promising of these is the combination of an electric motor and a fuel cell. However, the latter requires a source of hydrogen, for which there is no supply  
15 and distribution infrastructure comparable to that for liquid fuels.

The use of fuel cells is not just limited to vehicle applications. Emergent markets include domestic co-generation of heat and power, and power generation in remote locations. Again, the availability of hydrogen is a key issue, with natural gas often being the  
20 preferred fuel for domestic systems, and liquid hydrocarbons being more transportable to remote locations.

The problems of hydrogen supply and distribution can be overcome by generating it within the fuel-cell system. A hydrogen-rich gas stream, commonly known as 'reformat', can be  
25 produced by catalytically converting organic fuels (such as gasoline, natural gas or alcohol). The process, which is referred to as 'reforming' or 'fuel-processing', can occur by a number of different reaction mechanisms :

- dissociation (splitting of the fuel molecules),
- steam reforming (reaction of the fuel with H<sub>2</sub>O),
- 30 - partial oxidation (reaction of the fuel with O<sub>2</sub>, usually supplied as air)
- combinations of the above reactions.

Because the performance of the reformer has a direct effect on the power output from the fuel cell, deactivation of the catalyst cannot be allowed to proceed unchecked. However  
35 the process of power generation cannot be stopped to allow regeneration of the reformer,

when its performance falls below an acceptable level. The regeneration of such catalytic reactors whilst they are in use is the problem this invention sets out to solve.

5 In many instances, the performance of the catalyst declines while it is being used. Although the rate of decline can usually be reduced by changing the operating conditions, it is often accompanied by a drop in hydrogen and power output. One frequently practised method for restoring the performance of a fuel processor is to replace the catalyst periodically. Another method involves regenerating the catalyst while it remains in the  
10 processor, using a prescribed regeneration procedure (eg see JR Rostrup-Nielsen in Catalysis Today, Vol 37, 1997, p 225-232). However, both these require that the process of hydrogen-generation is interrupted in order to restore performance.

Thus in a first aspect, the present invention provides a method for regenerating a  
15 fuel-processing catalyst, while it is being used to supply hydrogen to a fuel cell, comprising any one or more of the steps of:

- passing fuel, air and steam through a reforming catalyst whilst the catalyst is heated by an external heat source such that the temperature of the catalyst may be  
20 adjusted,
- passing fuel, air and steam through a reforming catalyst and modulating the air and/or steam feed rate,
- passing, air, fuel and steam through a reforming catalyst and modulating the feed-rate of the fuel.
- 25 - passing fuel, air and steam through a reforming catalyst wherein additive is added to the feed.

and maintaining the hydrogen concentration in dry reformat above 25% throughout the operation of the catalyst.

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Where loss of performance is being caused by a particular component in a complex fuel mixture, the regeneration method can be targeted at the specific deactivating effect.

Thus in a second aspect, the present invention provides a method for preventing or retarding the de-activation of a fuel-processing catalyst while it is being used to supply  
35 hydrogen to a fuel cell comprising any one or more of the steps of:

- passing fuel, air and steam through a reforming catalyst whilst the catalyst is heated by an external heat source such that the temperature of the catalyst may be adjusted,

5 - passing fuel, air and steam through a reforming catalyst and modulating the air and/or steam feed rate,

- passing, air, fuel and steam through a reforming catalyst and modulating the feed-rate of the fuel,

10 passing fuel, air and steam through a reforming catalyst wherein additive is added to the feed.

and maintaining the hydrogen concentration in dry reformat above 25% throughout the operation of the catalyst.

15 In a preferred embodiment of the invention water is temporarily added to the feed. ('Feed' is a term used to describe the reactant mixture supplied to the fuel processor.) The water will be rapidly converted into steam in the catalyst. The water (steam) to carbon ratio in the feed may readily be adjusted in order to permit targeting of the regeneration method to a specific deactivating event. Adjusted for the purposes of this invention means  
20 increased or decreased. The oxygen to carbon ratio may also be adjusted for the same purpose, by adding or changing the feed-rate of air, or by changing the feed-rate of the fuel.

25 The catalyst may contain one or more base metals, which may include copper (often used for reforming methanol) and nickel (used for reforming natural gas and higher hydrocarbons). Alternatively, the catalyst may contain one or more precious metals, which may include gold, platinum, palladium, iridium, silver, rhodium and ruthenium. Furthermore, it may contain both base metal(s) and precious metal(s). The catalyst may also contain refractory materials, such as ceramics, metal oxides, perovskites, metal  
30 carbides and metal sulphides.

Additives may be added to the feed for various purposes, including acceleration of start-up of a fuel-processor, and the prevention or inhibition of its deactivation.

Alternatively, a fuel to which additives have been added during manufacture can be used. In a preferred embodiment of the invention, the additive is an oxygenate, and in an especially preferred embodiment the oxygenate is MTBE (methyl-tert-butylether).

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In order to facilitate the regeneration procedure, the temperature of the catalyst bed may be raised temporarily by an external energy source. Within a fuel cell system, the external energy source may be an electrical heater, or a burner (which combusts either some of the fuel or some of the hydrogen produced). In addition, or alternatively, the temperature of one or more of the feed components may be raised temporarily, again by an external heat source.

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Among the most common causes of deactivation of a fuel-processor is the retention of carbon or sulphur species by the catalyst. Therefore, in a further embodiment of the invention, catalyst regeneration may occur by removal of the carbon or sulphur species. The carbon species originate from the fuel molecules, and indicate the occurrence of undesired side reactions. The sulphur species originate either from indigenous contaminants in the fuel or from compounds deliberately added to the fuel (such as the odourants used to give natural gas its recognisable smell).

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The present invention will now be described by way of the following examples. It will be appreciated that many variations can be made to the invention herein described without departing from the present inventive concept.

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#### **Example 1 (Aliphatic fuel ; no regeneration)**

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A bed (0.2 g) of reforming catalyst was packed into a tubular quartz reactor, which was positioned at the centre of a furnace. A mixture of dodecane vapour (produced by vaporising the liquid at a rate of  $4 \text{ cm}^3 \text{ hour}^{-1}$ ), air ( $200 \text{ cm}^3 \text{ min}^{-1}$ ) and steam (produced by vaporising water at a rate of  $4 \text{ cm}^3 \text{ hour}^{-1}$ ) was passed through the catalyst bed, which was heated by the furnace. The furnace temperature was maintained at  $500^\circ\text{C}$ . The product stream (ie the reformat) passed through a drier before entering a gas chromatograph, which was used to analyse for hydrogen.



The initial concentration of hydrogen in the dry reformat was just above 25%, but declined to 20% within an hour, and to 15% within 4 hours.

#### **Example 2 (Regeneration by air pulses)**

The test procedure described in Example 1 was repeated with a fresh charge of catalyst, except that every 10 minutes the air feed-rate was increased to  $350 \text{ cm}^3 \text{ min}^{-1}$  for 30 seconds. Apart from the duration of the extra air pulses, the concentration of hydrogen in the dry reformat remained above 25% during 3 hours of testing.

#### **Example 3 (Regeneration by temperature excursions)**

The test procedure described in Example 1 was repeated with a fresh charge of catalyst. Whenever the hydrogen concentration in the dry reformat dropped below 25%, it could be restored by raising the furnace temperature to  $600^\circ\text{C}$  for 1 minute.

#### **Example 4 (Inhibition of de-activation by MTBE addition)**

The test procedure described in Example 1 was repeated with a fresh charge of catalyst, except that 10% (by volume) methyl-tert-butylether was added to the dodecane. The hydrogen concentration in the dry reformat remained above 25% throughout 5 hours of testing.

#### **Example 5 (Aromatic fuel ; no regeneration)**

A bed (0.2 g) of reforming catalyst was packed into a tubular quartz reactor, which was positioned at the centre of a furnace. A mixture of toluene vapour (produced by vaporising the liquid at a rate of  $4 \text{ cm}^3 \text{ hour}^{-1}$ ), air ( $175 \text{ cm}^3 \text{ min}^{-1}$ ) and steam (produced by vaporising water at a rate of  $4 \text{ cm}^3 \text{ hour}^{-1}$ ) was passed through the catalyst bed, which was heated by the furnace. The furnace temperature was maintained at  $500^\circ\text{C}$ . The initial concentration of hydrogen in the dry reformat was 33%, but declined to 25% within 3 hours. When the catalyst was replaced by a fresh charge and the feed-rate of steam was doubled (by increasing the rate of vaporising water to  $8 \text{ cm}^3 \text{ hour}^{-1}$ ), the initial

concentration of hydrogen in the dry reformat was 37%. Within 3 hours, the hydrogen concentration had declined to 30%.

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**Example 6 (Prevention of de-activation by extra air)**

The test procedure described in Example 5 was repeated with a fresh charge of catalyst, except that the air feed-rate was increased to  $200 \text{ cm}^3 \text{ min}^{-1}$ . The initial concentration of hydrogen in the dry reformat was 32%. The concentration remained  
10 unchanged during 3 hours of testing.

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## CLAIMS

1. A method for regenerating a fuel-processing catalyst, while it is being used to supply  
5 hydrogen to a fuel cell, comprising any one or more of the steps of:

- passing fuel, air and steam through a reforming catalyst whilst the catalyst is  
heated by an external heat source such that the temperature of the catalyst may be  
adjusted,

10 - passing fuel, air and steam through a reforming catalyst and modulating the air  
and/or steam feed rate,

- passing, air, fuel and steam through a reforming catalyst and modulating the  
feed-rate of the fuel.

15 - passing fuel, air and steam through a reforming catalyst wherein additive is  
added to the feed.

and maintaining the hydrogen concentration in dry reformat above 25%  
throughout the operation of the catalyst.

20 2. A method for preventing or retarding the de-activation of a fuel-processing catalyst  
while it is being used to supply hydrogen to a fuel cell comprising any one or more  
of the steps of:

25 - passing fuel, air and steam through a reforming catalyst whilst the catalyst is  
heated by an external heat source such that the temperature of the catalyst may be  
adjusted,

- passing fuel, air and steam through a reforming catalyst and modulating the air  
and/or steam feed rate,

30 - passing, air, fuel and steam through a reforming catalyst and modulating the  
feed-rate of the fuel.

- passing fuel, air and steam through a reforming catalyst wherein additive is  
added to the feed.

35 and maintaining the hydrogen concentration in dry reformat above 25%  
throughout the operation of the catalyst.

3. A method according to either claim 1 or claim 2, whereby water is temporarily added to the fuel.

5 4. A method according to claims 1 or 2 in which air is temporarily added to the feed.

5. A method according to claims 1 or 2 in which an additive is added to the feed.

6. A method according to claim 5 in which the additive is an oxygenate.

10

7. A method according to claim 6 in which the oxygenate is MTBE (methyl-tert-butylether).

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8. A method according to claims 1 or 2 in which the catalyst bed temperature is raised temporarily by an external heat source.

9. A method according to claims 1 or 2 in which the temperature of one or more of the reactant feeds is raised temporarily.

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## **CATALYSTS**

### **Abstract of the invention**

The present invention relates to methods for the regeneration of catalytic reactors.  
25 In particular it relates to methods for regenerating a fuel-processing catalyst whilst it is still being used to supply hydrogen to a fuel cell. The temperature of the catalyst may be adjusted, the air, steam or fuel feed rate may be adjusted. Alternatively, additives may be added to the feed.

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